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USSR - IRAN - PRC

Moscow responded to the U.S. hostage rescue attempt on 24 April just as it had dealt with speculation in the weeks before that Washington was contemplating military action—offering sharp propaganda criticism and derision and virtually no official comment. Routine-level commentary has assailed the rescue effort as a reckless action in violation of international law and charged Washington with exploiting the hostage issue for domestic political considerations as well as to enhance the U.S. political and military position in the Middle East. The only official reaction thus far came in remarks by Foreign Minister Gromyko—elicited in reply to questions at his Paris news conference—expressing opposition to any military action against Iran. Despite recent Soviet-Iranian talks on economic and technical cooperation, Moscow's reluctance to crowd Tehran with concrete expressions of support suggests continuing uncertainty over future Soviet-Iranian relations.

Beijing has expressed concern that the attempt to rescue the hostages has further complicated the U.S.-Iranian crisis and provided Moscow with opportunities both to divert attention from its intervention in Afghanistan and to make inroads into Iran. Beijing accordingly has called on both sides to act with restraint and resolve the crisis peacefully.

USSR CAUSTIC ON RESCUE MISSION, DISCREET ON SUPPORT FOR IRAN

Soviet comment has characterized the rescue attempt in blunt language as a "reckless action," a "shameful fiasco," and a violation of "all international laws and regulations." A Persian-language talk broadcast on the 29th, echoing unattributed allegations carried earlier by TASS and Moscow radio, noted Ayatollah Khomeini's charges that the real objective of the rescue operation was "to overthrow the present regime and to take Ayatollah Khomeini hostage." The bulk of the comment, however, has merely reiterated ongoing themes.* Moscow has again decried President Carter's alleged personal disregard for the hostages' fate and his supposedly paramount interest in securing

* The hostage rescue attempt prompted no increase in the number of Soviet broadcast commentary items on the U.S.-Iranian crisis, which for the past three weeks has ranged from 7 to 9 percent of the total number of commentary items monitored by FBIS.

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reelection and has continued to point out that the United States has ignored Iranian demands. Moscow also has tried to exploit the situation to stress allied dissatisfaction with U.S. actions.

GROMYKO REMARKS Gromyko was cautious in his Paris press conference remarks on 25 April, the day President Carter announced the abortive rescue mission. As reported in PRAVDA the following day, Gromyko responded to a question on the rescue operation by saying that the USSR opposed all military or "forcible" measures against Iran on the part of the United States "or anyone else"---a possible allusion to Iraq. The "only possible" path to a solution is a peaceful one, he said. Asked if the Soviet Union could be of assistance in freeing the hostages, Gromyko said that "no one is asking for this." Regarding the Soviet position on the hostage issue, he said it had been set forth earlier and there "is no need to repeat it." Gromyko dodged a question on a possible Iranian request for Soviet assistance should the United States interfere in Iran's affairs, saying that this was a "hypothetical situation," which he had no need to consider," and adding: "At any rate, I would prefer not to do so."*

Earlier, the first deputy chief of the CPSU Central Committee International Information Department, Valentin Falin, had been somewhat more forthcoming on similar questions. In a Munich SUEDEDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG interview, published on 19/20 April--not publicized in Soviet media--Falin said that "for now one cannot make any recommendation" on how the hostage issue could be resolved, and he conceded that "I do not envy" the United States in this situation. He reiterated that the Soviet Union did not approve of the holding of the American diplomats, an action "grossly at odds with international law." Asked if Moscow could use its influence on behalf of the hostages, Falin said "we have tried to be helpful" by informing the Tehran government that international law must be respected, and "the Americans have been informed about our steps." Repeating standard criticism of past U.S. policy in "imposing the shah on Iran," Falin said this did not mean that the Soviet Union regarded the taking of hostages as excusable.

OTHER COMMENT Aside from Gromyko's remarks, the closest Moscow has come to even a quasi-official statement on the rescue attempt was an unsigned TASS article on the 25th entitled "Stop This Recklessness," which was broadcast widely in Moscow radio's European

* Iranian President Bani-Sadr, in a news conference reported by Tehran radio on the 26th, responded to a question about the applicability of the 1921 Soviet-Iranian treaty in the event of an invasion of Iran by saying that the relevant articles of that agreement had been unilaterally repudiated by Iran. "We depend on ourselves and we will not agree to Soviet interference in this issue," he said.

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beams as well as to Iran, North America, and other areas. The 25 April article resembled another widely disseminated--and also unsigned--TASS article, of 8 April, which appeared to represent Moscow's semiofficial reaction to the U.S. announcement of the break in U.S.-Iranian relations on 7 April.* In the vein of the earlier TASS piece, the later one argued that if it were only a question of the hostages, the problem could have been resolved long ago on the basis of Iranian proposals. The earlier TASS article had maintained that U.S. actions were guided by "imperialist interests," not by concern for the U.S. Embassy personnel. The more recent one called the hostage issue a pretext for implementing an "aggressive and hegemonistic policy" aimed at forcing Iran to submit to imperialist diktat and at strengthening the U.S. presence in the region. And with an eye to the recent West European decisions on political and economic sanctions, TASS took a swipe at Washington's NATO allies for failing to try to stop the Americans' "reckless actions" and supporting instead the U.S. line of "blackmail, threats, and economic pressure" against Iran. The issue of the rescue mission was brushed aside in effect by Vitaliy Sobolev, a panelist on Moscow radio's weekly roundtable program on the 27th, who said the "military significance" of the action "is indeed not very great," the more so since it "resulted in failure." The losses were inconsiderable and were suffered, he noted unsympathetically, "by the aggressors themselves."

Playing to the Iranian audience, a Persian-language commentary by Igor Savchenko on the 26th struck the shrillest note. Expanding on an earlier TASS charge, Savchenko asserted that President Carter had "prepared death for tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of Iranians." And he called the "flood of rage" resulting from Washington's action "completely logical and legitimate." But he did not directly offer Soviet support to Iran, noting only that the country was supported by "all the world's progressive forces" and that Iran was "prepared to give a strong and silencing reply to imperialism's offenses." Other comment has also been cautious in extending Soviet sympathy: A 27 April RED STAR article merely observed, for example, that "all honest people in the world" support the Iranian people.

BEIJING REGRETS RESCUE ATTEMPT, FEARS SOVIET GAINS IN IRAN

Chinese concern over the impact of the rescue mission initially was conveyed authoritatively in a Foreign Ministry Information Department spokesman statement on 27 April, two days after President Carter's announcement of the aborted rescue operation. The seriousness with which Beijing views the potential for Soviet involvement in the

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situation was indicated by RENMIN RIBAO's subsequent publication of two Commentator articles, one on the 28th and the other on the 30th. XINHUA has also drawn heavily from international reaction to underscore its concern that the crisis be ended peacefully and without further advantage to the Soviet Union.

The statement by the Foreign Ministry Information Department spokesman charged that the rescue operation and U.S. sanctions imposed on Iran were violations of Iranian territorial integrity and sovereignty and "not helpful toward a solution" of the crisis. The statement at the same time expressed Beijing's hope that Tehran will release the U.S. hostages "as soon as possible," and, conveying Beijing's belief that Moscow seeks to profit from the situation, enjoined both sides to act with "restraint and prudence" and resolve the crisis through peaceful consultations "so that no opportunity will be given to people who have ulterior motives."

The 28 April RENMIN RIBAO Commentator article amplified Beijing's concern about the potential for increased Soviet involvement in the region. Expressing "regret" at the U.S. sanctions and violation of Iranian territory but calling the American people's consternation at Iran's continued retention of the hostages "understandable," Commentator urged both Washington and Tehran nevertheless to "take the whole situation into account." Noting that the independence and security of all the states on the Persian Gulf have been "seriously threatened" by the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the article stated that "it is very clear who will benefit from the worsening of U.S.-Iranian relations" and suggested that a negotiated solution to the crisis and a gradual improvement in relations between Washington and Tehran not only conforms to the interest of both sides but also will "help stabilize the world situation."

The second RENMIN RIBAO Commentator article dwelled specifically on Soviet attempts to "pour oil on the fire" of the Iranian-American situation in the wake of the rescue attempt, taking note of alleged Soviet efforts to build up its forces on the Iranian border and to "make known its readiness to support Iran in military and other fields" in the face of U.S. "pressure." In the context of Soviet readiness to use U.S. pressure on Iran as a pretext for direct intervention, Commentator warned, all countries share a responsibility in appealing to both Washington and Tehran to "exercise great restraint" and resolve the hostage issue "in a proper way." A 28 April commentary by XINHUA correspondent Guo Ping, a frequent commentator on South and Southeast Asian affairs, had similarly elaborated Beijing's concerns over Soviet ambitions in the region, pointing out that the U.S. rescue operation has provided Moscow with a pretext to act as Iran's "protector," build up its forces on Iran's borders, and even intervene directly in Iran.

Since the beginning of the Iranian crisis, Beijing has maintained a balanced approach, mildly criticizing both U.S. actions toward

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Iran and Tehran's failure to observe international conventions and warning of the potential for new Soviet involvement in the region. A 26 November Foreign Ministry Information Department spokesman statement--Beijing's earliest authoritative reaction to the crisis--urged that all conventions of international behavior be observed universally, while condemning all interference in one country's internal affairs by other countries, and called for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Accompanying XINHUA comment had warned about the potential for Soviet advances in the region as a result of the deterioration of U.S.-Iran relations, concerns which heightened in the wake of Moscow's intervention in Afghanistan.

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EAST - WEST RELATIONS

GROMYKO UNYIELDING ON EAST-WEST ISSUES DURING PARIS VISIT

Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko's 23-25 April visit to Paris--his first official consultation with a major Western power since Moscow intervened in Afghanistan last December--revealed no give in the uncompromising Soviet position in the current East-West impasse. Gromyko pointedly rebuffed his French host's call for some positive Soviet steps on Afghanistan to improve the East-West climate, reaffirming Moscow's position that Soviet troops would be withdrawn only after "aggression" against that country had ceased. The results of Gromyko's visit complement other signs of continuing Soviet inflexibility on East-West matters, most recently its harsh assessment of the West's latest proposals at the just-concluded round of MBFR talks in Vienna.

Gromyko's public statements during the Paris visit left no doubt that, in the Soviet view, it is up to the West to take the first move toward resuming substantive East-West negotiations. Following his luncheon with President Giscard d'Estaing on the 24th, Gromyko reiterated Moscow's interest in detente and desire to overcome the "difficulties" in the international situation. But nothing new in the Soviet position emerged from his visit. He repeated Moscow's position on the causes of the current impasse and of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan without nuance in his 25 April press conference. He dismissed Western statements on the Afghanistan situation as "artificially inflated." Gromyko explicitly rejected France's views on the Afghan issue, maintaining that any talk of withdrawing Soviet troops first and then discussing other questions--the French position--was a "mirage . . . a waste of time . . . simply unrealistic."

Gromyko's remarks during the visit served to reconfirm Moscow's inflexible public posture on East-West arms control discussions since NATO decided to modernize its theater forces in December. In his press conference Gromyko addressed SALT only in the context of accusing the Carter Administration of arranging its "funeral," and he failed altogether to mention the MBFR talks, whose 20th round concluded in Vienna earlier this month. Gromyko stated during his press conference that he had reached a "certain understanding" with the French on the holding of a European conference on military detente, an idea on which Moscow and Paris have differed in the past. The final communique on the visit, however, showed little evidence of progress, merely recording the two sides' expectation that the

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